

- Report No. 74
- September-October 1987

Women's Concerns

Report



Wife Abuse

Last year at a workshop on domestic violence, a pastor told me, "If we believe violence in families is a problem, we should really be concerned about it and do something... There is a 70-year-old woman in my congregation who I think is abused by her husband. But I really don't know, and I don't want to interfere or make trouble."

Violence in families is a startlingly common problem. It is hurtful and frightening and messy—doubly hurtful and frightening and messy when it touches people we know and love. We can choose to blind ourselves to family violence, but this will not make it go away. Or we can choose to understand the pain of family violence and provide places of support and hope for the women, men and children who are its victims.



This issue of *Report* is an invitation to read about spouse abuse in a Mennonite context. It is an invitation to learn from some Mennonites who have lived with this reality, to study some Biblical texts that can either be roadblocks or resources in the healing process, and to dream about an alternative legal process that can help bring justice in the aftermath of the violence.

We hope this *Report* will give you the courage and strength to face the painful reality of domestic violence in our midst. Perhaps it will also motivate you to find ways in which you can help bring healing and wholeness to individuals in your community who are suffering because of family violence.—*Melita Rempel*

The compiler of this issue serves as quarter-time staff person for the MCC Task Force on Domestic Violence. Melita was assisted in putting this newsletter together by other task force members, including Janet Umble Reedy, Peggy Regehr, Clare Schumm, Shirley Souder and Ruby Friesen Zehr. The task force welcomes your comments and suggestions; direct them to Melita Rempel at 205-1317 A Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3G 0V3.

by Shirley B. Souder

An Overview

Many terms are used to describe women battering: domestic violence, spouse abuse, wife assault, wife battering, etc. None of these terms adequately describe the phenomenon in which a woman who has an intimate relationship is abused by her partner, in an effort to control her behavior.

Woman battering is no respecter of persons; it occurs within all socioeconomic, racial, religious and age groups. Research suggests that woman battering is quite common, although statistics vary. Widely quoted estimates indicate that one in 10 Canadian women is battered. In the United States, 1.8 million wives are severely assaulted each year by their husbands.

The abuse can take various forms. *Physical abuse*, or direct physical attack, is the type of abuse most commonly associated with the term "battered woman." It includes pushing, slapping, hitting, beating, kicking, choking, inflicting injury with weapons, bondage and homicide. Physical abuse can be sexual in nature.

Sexual abuse occurs when sexual relations are forced against a partner's wishes, when sexual practices that are uncomfortable or degrading are demanded, when one is physically injured or physically threatened to gain compliance. When sexual abuse occurs in a marriage, it is marital rape.

Psychological abuse is the systematic destruction of a partner's self-worth through harassment, threats and

"And you keep coming back to the greatest puzzle of all: At a time when one of every six relationships is marred by violence, when at least one of every five women being treated for injuries in emergency rooms has been abused before, when one of every five homicides in Philadelphia is thought to involve couples, how is it

possible that so widespread a war can be waged amid so much silence?"

—Dick Polman, *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, July 26, 1987

"...writing about violence against Native American women by Native American men is frightening and dangerous to Native American people; it is dangerous to say anything that can be used to perpetuate negative beliefs (held by most Americans)"
—Paula Gunn Allen, *Working Together*, April 1985

The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns *REPORT* USPS 367-790 is published bimonthly jointly by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Peace Section, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501 and by MCC Canada Peace and Social Concerns, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. Second-class postage paid at Akron, PA.

deprivation. It includes threats of physical violence against the victim (or others who are important to her), undermining her sense of safety, well-being and control. In situations where actual assault has occurred, threats of violence can be terrorizing.

"Emotional beatings" may take the form of name-calling; insults and cursing; constant criticism; public embarrassment; general lack of consideration of her feelings and needs; jealous control and unfounded accusations; and deprivation of sleep, friendships, and other life necessities.

Destruction of property and pets, particularly her property, is another form of abuse. Implicit in this act is the message, "Next time it could be you." In *Rape in Marriage*, Diana E.H. Russell notes the striking similarities between techniques of abuse of women by their intimate partners and techniques in brainwashing and torture of prisoners of war.

Overall effects of the abuse include a weakening of her mental and physical ability to resist, social isolation and progressive loss of self-esteem—all reinforcing her sense of helplessness and dependence on her abuser. Without effective intervention, the abuse generally escalates. Severe physical and psychological injury, even death, can result.

Many common misunderstandings about woman battering further perpetuate the problem. Some of the common myths, as adapted from Edward W. Gondolf's *Men Who Batter*, include:

Myth: Women provoke violence. Therefore they deserve what they get.

Reality: No woman deserves to be beaten or abused, regardless of the kind of person she is. Provocation is an excuse the offender uses to avoid responsibility for his own violence, which is a criminal act.

Myth: Batterers are violent in all their relationships.

Reality: The "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" syndrome appears in men who batter. They often present themselves well in the community while being abusive at home.

Myth: If women were really bothered by assault, they would speak up.

Reality: Battered women believe they and their children will be at even greater risk if they disclose the abuse. They may blame themselves and feel ashamed. Or, they may have talked and not been believed.

Myth: Battered women always leave home.

Reality: Economic and emotional dependency on the abuser, his threats, and responsibility for children make it difficult to leave or tempting to return. Many women remain committed to their marriages and hope he will change.

Myth: Children need their father, even if he is violent—or, "I'm only staying for the sake of the children."

Reality: Children are likely to be emotionally impaired by exposure to violence. They may learn to use violence to deal with stress, further perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Myth: Once a battered woman, always a battered woman.

Reality: Women can and do break the cycle—often through leaving the man who batters.

Since the 1970's there has been an increasing awareness of woman battering. Research in the fields of family violence and victimization of women has made clear that woman battering is too widespread to ignore. In our victim-blaming society, women are often asked why they stay in abusive relationships. More recently, however, the question is being asked, "Why do men batter?"

Men who batter have learned to use violence against family members to deal with stress. Many have learned this behavior in their own families where they observed their fathers being abusive. Some were physically or sexually abused as children. This acceptance of violence in the family is reinforced in a patriarchal society which glorifies violence against those perceived as weak.

Men who batter have low self-esteem, often resulting from abuse, disapproval or neglect by an alcoholic or authoritarian parent. They hold unrealistic expectations of themselves and their spouse. They often feel like failures. They rarely acknowledge feelings and fear intimacy and vulnerability. Batterers are unable to trust others and tend to be jealous of their spouses, on whom they are exceedingly dependent. They hold traditional views of sex roles and parenting and exhibit an intense need to control. Friends and extended family may never see the violence since it is protected by the privacy of his "castle."

Men who batter will minimize, deny and lie about their violent behavior. They tend to blame others for their behavior. Men who batter are often both homicidal and suicidal, which heightens the spouse's entrapment.

Battering behavior usually follows a cyclical pattern. Lenore Walker describes the "cycle of violence" in *The Battered Woman* (1979). In the *tension-building stage*,

"The traditional response of the black community to violence committed against its most vulnerable members—women and children—has been silence. This silence does not stem from acceptance of violence as a black cultural norm, but rather from shame, fear, and an understandable, but nonetheless detrimental sense of racial loyalty."
—Evelyn C. White, *Working Together*, Nov.-Dec. 1984



"You can't turn it off when you come home. You can't turn it off when you read a newspaper, because someone's always getting killed, someone we've worked with. You can't turn it off when you watch TV, because of all the insidious stuff, like *The Honeymooners*, when Ralph tells Alice he's going to send her to the moon, or *I Love Lucy*, because Lucy is this

dingbat who gets what she wants by being playfully fearful of Ricky...And you wind up sitting in a meeting and wondering if the guy at the end of the table is one of the ones who beats his wife."
—Shelter worker, *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, July 26, 1987

tension mounts as he copes with stress by verbal attacks and insults against his partner. When the tension becomes unbearable, there is an explosion, the *acute battering incident* (phase two). The incident is usually triggered by his internal state, rather than by the woman's behavior. Following the explosion, there may be a *honeymoon stage* (phase three) in which he becomes contrite, begging for forgiveness and promising never to batter again. As the cycle repeats itself, the honeymoon period shortens and the violence tends to escalate.

As battered women live within the cycle of violence, they go through various stages identified by Francis B. Woods in *Living Without Violence* (1981). *Denial of the problem* is an abused woman's most common response to early battering incidents. As she begins to recognize that she is battered, *guilt, self-blame, and shame* characterize the woman's feelings. Efforts at *help-seeking* are often negative experiences as she is disbelieved by family and friends or met with inadequate services, driving her back into the violent relationship.

In the ambivalent stage, the abused woman may leave and return to the relationship more than once as she tries to make a decision about the relationship. Ambivalence often lasts for years, leading many potential helpers to give up on her in frustration. Resolution may be sudden or gradual. When she decides to *live without violence*, whether staying in or leaving the relationship, the woman generally needs continued support as she rebuilds her life and self-esteem and recovers from the impact of the violence.

At one time or another, most of us will be in situations inviting a response to family violence. Whatever your relationship to the person who is asking you for help, take that person seriously. Know that both victim and abuser are likely minimizing the extent of the violence. Men and women in abusive relationships need to know that there is no justification for violence in the family. The batterer is responsible for stopping the violence. Ensuring safety is the first priority. This often involves a physical timeout during which the couple is separated and both can do some thinking. At the least, an emergency plan is essential when the couple stays together.

Before a crisis, identity resources in your community that can assist in situations of family violence. Locate a safe house or women's shelter, a treatment program for men who batter, a local hot line, a community mental health center, etc. Explore specific services available to battered women and their children and to men who batter; become acquainted with persons providing these services. Become

familiar with criminal and civil law as it pertains to family violence. Educating ourselves and our communities is the first step toward the prevention of family violence.■

In her work as a clinical social worker, Shirley B. Souder has encountered women and men who are or have been in situations of family violence. She lives in Elkhart, Ind., and serves on the MCC Domestic Violence Task Force.

I Am

I AM one of many victims of domestic violence.

I AM a professional, middle-class woman. I was active in the Mennonite constituency of rural Canada until I left my husband, John, also a professional and church leader. I was stunned and ashamed by his violent outbursts in the first years of our marriage, and felt that in some way I had failed. I tried harder to please, and to make a good marriage.

I AM a mother to Marvin, Kevin and Sandra. For years I trained my children not to do or say the wrong thing for fear of provoking their father's violent temper. We were confused and anxious, but silent in the face of bruised buttocks, broken toys, throwing, chasing, hitting, swearing, name-calling, smashed doors and walls. The children became hyper or withdrawn.

My sister's probing helped me to break the silence about our day-to-day realities. When she offered support, I felt relief and amazement that someone cared in spite of the ugliness for which I felt responsible. I was encouraged to share my dark story with several close woman friends in my church community. Their unconditional love and support helped me to greater clarity about abuse I could deny no longer.

JUNE. Without a great deal of planning, I left John and took my children to my sister's home. I was overwhelmed with guilt and responsibility for the violence—

...guilt that I hadn't done enough to stop the violence

...guilt for raising bad children that had to be controlled by spanking

...guilt for breaking up a family,

...guilt for causing violence by my ideas of women's equality

...guilt for not "working things out 'properly.'"

"There is a claim that domestic violence programs are anti-family. This is not true. Abuse is anti-family. A shelter may only assure that in self-destruction a home dissolves rather than explodes. To blame shelters for the failure of marriages is like blaming firemen for arson."

—Lois Harrington

"One time, I kicked her off the front step, and her head hit the pavement. Twenty people must've seen it. Nobody did anything. Cops came six times over the years. They never did anything.'...So why should he think he was doing anything wrong?"

—Dick Polman, *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, July 26, 1987

At a meeting arranged by the church, I experienced the polarization of women against patriarchy. Here the abuse was trivialized. I felt that my leaving was blamed on women's liberation, on feminist theology, on my practice of journaling and on my inability to forgive and forget. The booming male voices silenced the female voices advocating on my behalf.

After only a week of separation, I went back.

JULY. John finally agreed to marriage counseling. At the Mennonite mental health facility in our region, the male counselor focused on John's needs and feelings and on my duty to wear the wedding ring I took off several months previous. The violent behaviors which I described were trivialized by the counselor's remark that his children too accused him of causing bruises by spanking. At our second meeting, the counselor turned to my husband and declared, "See, you can't win with her." After his judgment, I saw no point in going back.

In my family, my church, and the mental health institution I felt victimized and blamed for provoking my husband's anger. By victimizing the victims, the patriarchal system protected itself from change.

AUGUST. A life-threatening incident consolidated my decision to leave, this time in a well executed and final move. I made my plans in secret since John had refused to discuss a separation and had threatened to fight for the children if I left. Again my close friends and neighbors gave physical and emotional support. A friend helped us find a refuge. At the women's shelter, I was supported in securing the legal documents I needed for our safety: sole custody, maintenance and police protection.

SEPTEMBER. We moved from the shelter to a friend's home to a one-bedroom apartment. The moving, the schools, the child-care arrangements, the job search, the tight budget—it was all an incredible strain but I was determined to survive and to create a better future for my children. In spite of the stress, I felt free in a way that I had not felt for 10 years. I saw healing taking place in myself and in the children. A professional therapist helped me through the crisis of separation. Ongoing support from friends kept me going.

WINTER. There was little communication with my former church in the country. The women from the church who had given me support in moving out continued to relate by letter and telephone.

John continued to live and work in the rural community. The children saw him on weekends. John sought continued counseling from the mental health facility to process his grief and build self-esteem.

APRIL. John wanted to be reunited with his family. He seemed to have developed better parenting skills and a greater respect for me. I agreed to work toward a reconciliation through an independent counselor. Why did I consent to this? I continue to seek answers to this question. I wanted the children to have a live-in father. I needed day-to-day support in raising the children. I wanted to be reconciled to my parents. At the same time, I feared my own anger and bitterness would prevent a meaningful relationship. Since I had been conditioned to devalue my feelings and ideas, I believed I could put my self aside for the sake of the children.

I sought to protect myself and the children by drawing up a written "Contract for Cohabitation" that would clearly state the conditions for relationships, including a process for conflict resolution if abuse recurred.

JULY. John moved into our household. I wasn't ready and plunged into the worst depression I have ever known.

Throughout the next year there were occasional recurrences of violence, more emotional than physical. These incidents were harder to deal with because the damage was internal. It was hard to articulate and value hurt feelings, plummeting self-esteem and restricted choices in the face of cold reason.

APRIL. The violence escalated to an unbearable point. The children and I walked on marbles to avoid John's rage. As the abuse increased, we isolated ourselves more and more. We feared the shame of John's anger in public. I was not coping. I felt worthless, that any love or generosity I brought to the relationship was turned into mud.

The contract had been violated so many times that it was meaningless and I couldn't fall back on it. John refused to enter the contract's process for conflict resolution. He refused to see a counselor. He was impervious to feelings and needs other than his own. He accused the children of provoking his anger. In private, he promised that, with a little more will power and my full support, he could change. All he needed was my love.

"We must be as committed to the sanctity of personhood as we are to the permanence of marriage... After all, to sacrifice persons on the altar of marriage is not less idolatrous than to offer up children to Baal."
—John Regehr, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 7, 1986



by Mary Kauffmann-Kennel

The Church: A Roadblock for Battered Women

"Early in our marriage I went to a clergyman who, after a few visits, told me that my husband meant no real harm, that he was just confused and felt insecure. I was encouraged to be more tolerant and understanding. Most important, I was told to forgive him the beatings just as Christ had forgiven me from the cross. I did that, too. Things continued."

The church has no better record of helping battered women than does secular society. Research shows that, in general, battered women often do not seek help from clergy and when they do, responses are all too similar to the one above (from Del Martin's *Battered Wives*).

Besides not being believed or taken seriously, battered women have learned from clergy and the church that God's will for them is to remain in their marriage and submit to an abusive husband, to forgive him, to pray and believe that God will change him, and to endure the suffering.

The church's teachings have in fact fed into the violence of battering relationships. The church's misinterpretation and misapplication of the Bible prevents it from being the resource it can and should be.

The major misinterpretation is that the Bible supports patriarchy, especially in male/female relationships in courtship and marriage. The Genesis 2 creation account and the Genesis 3 "fall" account have been used to support hierarchical relationships in which women are seen as subservient by nature and men—starting with creation and especially after Eve succumbed to the serpent's temptation—have a right to dominate and control women in the family.

New Testament teachings on marriage have been used to support woman's subordination and rightful subjection to man. Ephesians 5 has become classic in its use for preaching this "proper" marriage relationship. The (mis)interpretation has gone several ways. The husband/father is seen as the absolute head of the household whom the wife and children must obey without question. It is therefore believed that if the woman were truly submissive, her husband would not respond violently to her.

I was desperate when I discovered a new community program for victims of domestic violence. In the six months of individual and group therapy that followed, I learned about the cycle of violence, about safety plans, and about the documented impacts of violence against women and children. The renewal of personal strength was a great relief.

OCTOBER. The violence at home decreased as I used new skills and insights to intercept the cycle and to hold John accountable for his actions.

JANUARY. The violence again escalated. Typical of abusers, John has caught on to my new skills and found new ways to subvert my strength. Again, the household is more and more controlled by efforts to avoid his rage.

I feel terribly alone. My efforts to survive within our combined household are becoming futile, and I yearn for some intervention that will make John account for his actions.

By now, the relationships between the children and their father have deteriorated badly. Kevin tells me he hates his daddy and retreats into silence. Marvin shares feelings about wanting to kill himself. He experiences chronic headaches and insomnia. (John calls him a hypochondriac.) Marvin wishes daddy didn't live with us. Both children need professional help. Sandra acts out, testing the limits, deliberately destroying games and toys. The children bully each other with hitting and kicking.

I know, without a doubt, that living with John has generated more brokenness than healing, more chaos than peace, more oppression than freedom. The future looks hard as my choices narrow. I know it is my responsibility to provide my children a safe and healthy environment in which to grow and mature.

I AM determined to survive.

I AM determined to protect my children's right to safety.

I AM.■

The author is a Canadian woman who has chosen to remain anonymous. She is a writer and educator.

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? I have cried desperately for help, but still it does not come. During the day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer; I call at night but get no rest.
—Psalm 22:1-2

"You relied on the Lord," they say. "Why didn't he save you? If the Lord likes you why doesn't he help you?"
—Psalm 22:8

It was you who brought me safely through birth and when I was a baby, you kept me safe. I have relied on you since the day I was born, and you have always been my God. Do not stay away from me! Trouble is near, and there is no one to help.
—Psalm 22:9-11

This unbending perspective on submission contributes to a psychosocial syndrome called "learned helplessness" in which the woman accepts the violence as a normal part of her life and, seeing no alternatives, sinks into numb passiveness.

The church's teaching on the permanency of marriage (Matthew 19:3-9) has kept women in marriages where they are beaten for years. This belief conflicts with our present understanding that often the only effective means of breaking the cycle of violence is physical separation of husband and wife. Though the church's stand against divorce is not as absolute as in the past, it is still strong and often detrimental to the well-being of battered women.

The Biblical teaching on forgiveness (Matthew 19:21-22) has also been misapplied to the battered woman's situation. Forgiveness is often interpreted to mean to forget the abuse or pretend it never happened, while not holding the abuser accountable for his actions. Forgiveness feeds directly into the "honeymoon phase" of the well-documented cycle of violence: the point after the violent act when the abuser, feeling guilty and sorry, apologizes. The woman, eager for him to change, gladly forgives him—again and again. This action feeds the cycle of violence, virtually ensuring that not only will battering recur, but that it will also likely escalate in intensity and frequency.

Believing strongly that God can and does change lives, Christian women continue in abusive relationships, confident that God will intervene and change their husbands' violent ways. If this does not happen they remind themselves or are reminded by the church to pray harder, to have more faith.

The battered woman seeks to find some meaning in the pain she is enduring. In her search for meaning she (with the help of clergy and friends) may see her suffering as God's judgment or will. (I Peter 2:18-21, Romans 5:3-5)

God may be seen as a stern judge punishing her for some past deed for which she has long felt guilty. She may believe that her failure as a wife and a Christian prompted the abuse. The message to her is to get right with God and all will be well.

She may understand her suffering to be God's will, believing God is using her example of patience and forgiveness to bring her husband to Christ. She may believe that since following Christ is the way of the cross, the abuse is her cross to bear in life. The abused woman may also view the battering as testing by God to strengthen her faith.

She may take the Matthew 5:39 admonition to turn the other cheek to mean passively accepting her husband's violence. I suspect that Mennonite women are particularly prone to passive non-resistance as their godly response to abuse.

Every one of these approaches to find meaning in suffering blames the victim for her suffering rather than placing responsibility on the abuser. The battered woman has no alternative but to accept and endure the violence—thus contributing to her sense of helplessness and worthlessness. These misinterpretations and misapplications of biblical teachings help keep battered women victims in violent relationships.

Jesus came preaching the good news of salvation. What is the good news that battered women need to hear?

Battered wives must hear that patriarchy is not divinely ordained. Though the biblical stories and teachings are set within a context of a patriarchal society, the message is again and again one of liberation from oppression and concern for the well-being of all human beings, women included.

They must hear that women as well as men are created in the image of God and equally given dominion over the earth (Genesis 1). The Genesis 2 creation story does not teach that women are subservient to men and Genesis 3 emphasizes humanity's sin, not woman's.

Battered wives must hear that Ephesians 5 teaches mutual submission between husband and wife. I Corinthians 7 clearly teaches mutuality in regards to the conjugal rights of husband and wife.

These women must hear that while marriage is intended to be permanent, Jesus always placed higher priority on people than on institutions. (Note Jesus' teachings on the Sabbath, Mark 2:27.) Besides, the abuser has already violated the marriage covenant and destroyed the family unity with his violence, usually long before the woman seeks a separation from him.

These victims of abuse must understand that biblical forgiveness does not include or intend repeated submission to violence. Teachings on forgiveness must be balanced with responsibility of the one forgiven to repent and change his behavior. (Matthew 18:15-20)

The battered woman must hear that God's ability to change her husband or bring him to salvation does not depend on her willingness to live with an abusive husband.

My strength is gone, gone like
water spilled on the ground. All
my bones are out of joint; my
heart is like melted wax. My
throat is as dry as dust, and my
tongue sticks to the roof of my
mouth. You have left me for
dead in the dust.
—Psalm 22:14-15

O Lord, don't stay away from
me! Come quickly to my rescue!
—Psalm 22:19



Perhaps most of all the battered woman needs to encounter a God who is not only a judge but a loving, compassionate God who cares about her suffering. This God does not will anyone to suffer. Suffering happens because of evil in the world. God is present with her in her suffering, but in no way does this mean that God wants her to continue to suffer.

The church has wonderful, powerful potential to be a resource for battered women. We are increasingly aware of how our biblical interpretation and theology have kept battered women stuck in violent relationships. May our preaching, teaching and relationships within the congregation reflect the good news of salvation for these victims of violence.■

Mary Kauffmann-Kennel is responsible for pastoral care on the leadership team at Southside Fellowship in Elkhart, Ind. She graduated from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in May 1987.

on Raised Forgiveness

Growing up Mennonite, I was taught early in life that we were called to be peacemakers in the world. I came to believe that in following Jesus' steps, with God's love flowing through me, I could be a peacemaker and be instrumental in calming strife and conflict. As a woman-child, I learned to be nurturing, to help the unfortunate, to always think of my husband as the head of the house and the ultimate authority in our home.

I will not tell you that cruel reality has changed all my beliefs. However, they have been tested and I have learned more about violence than I ever wanted to know.

Before I ever read about it in books, I learned about the "cycle of violence" in my own home and I developed my own terms to describe it. The cycle begins with a tension-building stage which ultimately leads to the nightmare of a major violent incident. After that comes the final stage, "the days of wine and roses."

Whenever people share a living space they run into little problems. He leaves the cap off the toothpaste and she drops the towel on the bathroom floor. It's part of life, part of the necessary give-and-take when people live

together under the same roof. These are things you can talk about, problems you can solve together.

But in our house the problems were not solved. Subconsciously I believed that, as wife, it was my job to smooth out life's wrinkles. So I would give in—but he would not be satisfied. Instead, his anger and his criticism grew. I tried to please him but he would not be soothed. I was blamed for just about everything and I got so that I accepted that blame. Once he threw his brush at me in anger and accused me of breaking it. He threw his plate when he didn't like what I had fixed for dinner. I started to feel, through the physical and verbal bombardment, that maybe he was right and that his anger was justified.

Physical and verbal abuse became a regular pattern. He would grab me or push me if he thought I wasn't listening to him. He would throw things and tell me that I was a lousy wife or mother or housekeeper. And I kept trying to do everything right, willing to do anything for peace in my home, still believing that I could make it all come out all right. But the tension continued to build and I'd walk on eggshells. Suddenly, the violence would explode.

A beating is a hard thing to describe. It's a hard thing to remember, not because the memories have faded, but because they are so clear and painful. I felt an inexpressible fear, my arms pinned immobile to a bed by the knees of the man I loved, his fist coming toward my face. I have looked in the mirror and not recognized myself.

It is like an unbelievable nightmare. It is unbelievable to think that the man who professes to love you and with whom you vowed to share your life would actually do this to you. This nightmarish quality makes it easy to believe that it won't happen again. He promised me that every time, crying and begging for forgiveness. I believe that his promises were made honestly. He saw himself as a kind and loving man and he couldn't believe what he had done either.

And me? Well, I was raised on forgiveness. How many times did Jesus tell us to forgive? Did he say to forgive only if it was a minor offense? Of course not! So I would forgive, wanting desperately to believe that he wouldn't strike me again. I would try again, to be a better Christian, to be a better wife.

And so, after the tears and the pleading and the forgiving, long before the black eyes and bruises were healed, we would be trapped again in the days of wine and roses. He would be kind and loving. I would be forgiving. He would



• **For Further Study**

Reading Materials

- Bussert, Joy M.K. *Battered Women: From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment*. New York: Lutheran Church of America, Division for Mission in North America. 1986. An incisive summary of theological themes, including pastoral and prophetic responses.

- Green, Holly Wagner. *Turning Fear to Hope: Help for Marriages Troubled by Abuse*. New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1984. An evangelical Christian perspective on wife abuse that explores religious themes and offers suggestions for battered women and counselors.
- MacLeod, Linda. *Wife Battering in Canada: A Vicious Circle*. Ottawa: The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. 1980. A good basic text

and the first comprehensive study of wife assault in Canada.

- MCC Domestic Violence Task Force. *The Purple Packet: Domestic Violence Resources for Pastoring Persons: Wife Abuse*. 1987. A collection of articles providing definitions, personal stories and practical tools for pastoral care. Available for \$3 from MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9 and from the MCC Office of Criminal

nurse my wounds. He would be considerate and helpful and gentle. He'd do the dishes! He'd take me out to dinner, he'd buy me flowers and gifts. He tried to make me feel safe in my own home. Although I wanted out the first time there was violence, I was hooked on the promises and my own hopes for the future.

He needed to feel that he was taking steps in the right direction. He sought counseling but wanted me to go with him. Once he told me that he thought I must be an angel sent from God to teach him about peace. This is powerful stuff! Next he suggested marital counseling since the problem belonged to both of us and it was here that I began to gain the strength that I personally needed to finally reach out for help. But it did nothing for our marriage—things I said in the counseling session were often cause for verbal abuse later. Slowly but surely we would move back into the tension-building stage and before I knew it we had gone full circle again.

Around and around and around, always spiraling downward. I felt hopelessly trapped. I lost all self-esteem. With my "missionary complex" I had thought that I could help him. But I failed again and again—I couldn't stop the violence.

My husband tried to alienate me from my family, my friends and my church. Going to church was such a struggle that it was easier and sometimes safer to not even try. The church only made me feel more inadequate because of its emphasis on family stability and church participation. My pride would not allow me to admit or speak of the problems in my home.

He began to threaten my life if I would ever leave him. Sometimes he threatened harm to my family and friends. The threats, together with my belief that "for better, for worse" was for life, made it almost impossible to think of leaving. I was afraid. Afraid to tell anyone, afraid to leave, afraid to get up in the morning, afraid not to get up. I was afraid of the hopeless eyes I saw staring back at me in the mirror.

I finally realized that I was living in a kind of hell, and that it surely couldn't be God's will for anyone to live like this. So I ran away to my town's Crisis Intervention Center.

That's where I began to learn to be alive again. I began to pull the shreds of my life around me, the beginning of a long process of education and recovery. I learned that I was not alone, that it was not my fault, that thousands of other women like myself have been and are being beaten

by someone they love, that the victim cannot help the abuser.

I have learned so much. I know now that I could have called the police the very first time and that that might have done some good. No one deserves to be abused and submitting to such abuse is not the way for us to be God's peacemakers.

There were times when I wished I were dead. But I'm alive and I'm grateful for that. Some women do die, killed by the man who promised to cherish them. Some women kill. Sometimes it seems that death is the only way out. But today I know that there is a strong network of caring, loving people who will listen when I need to talk. These people have helped me to live again.■

Even though the writer of this story is now removed from her violent situation, out of concern for her continued safety she prefers to remain anonymous.

by Janet Umble Reedy



Reflections

After several intense hours at the hospital emergency room with B., someone asked me, "How do you keep from getting depressed?" I gave her some not very good answers, but this morning I am depressed. Last night I was feeling the adrenalin high. This morning, I am feeling the pain of B. and her family. I am feeling the powerlessness of knowing that nothing I can do can save them. I am feeling a sense of hopelessness, of doubt that things will get better for B.—or that her children will overcome the scars they already have as teenagers.

How do I keep from getting depressed? The first answer is that I don't always.

How do I keep my perspective? How do I overcome my depression? I tell myself that I can reach out to B., I can care for her, listen to her, offer her a hand, but I am not responsible for her. I cannot change her or her situation. I cannot make her do anything.

I can grieve for B. and I can cry with her, but her pain is not my pain. My life has not been like hers. I can celebrate the joy and strength of my own relationships, not forgetting

- NiCarthy, Ginny. *Getting Free: A Handbook for Women in Abusive Relationships*. Seattle: Seal Press. 1982. A self-help manual for battered women. Also note *Talking It Out: A Guide to Groups for Abused Women* by the same author and publisher.



- Pressman, Barbara M. *Family Violence: Origins and Treatment*. Guelph, Ontario: Office for Educational Practice. 1984. Overview of wife battering dynamics, with comprehensive treatment for batterers, victims and their children.
- Russell, Diana E.H. *Rape in Marriage*. New York: Macmillan. 1983. A study of marital rape with profiles of husband-rapists.

hers, but not letting what I know about hers diminish my own. My relationships are one of the sources of my strength, and I am grateful for them.

I can tell myself that life is not always what it appears to be. Out of great pain, great joy can come. Out of death comes life. B. has strengths within her—God is within her—and I have no way of knowing what will emerge from her.

I can allow my anger at the injustice which B. has experienced—at the way she has been mistreated since she was a child by people more powerful than she—to be turned into positive action. That righteous anger keeps me going—keeps me pushing on, keeps me challenging the status quo, challenging the myths of the powerful.

But having said all this, there are still mornings like this morning, when I feel the heaviness of the pain of the B.'s of the world.

* * * * *

During Advent I put a purple candle on my desk. For me, Advent is a time of anticipation, symbolically as I await the entry of God into the world, and literally as I look forward to celebrations with family and friends. But I know too many people for whom Christmas is a painful, lonely time. I need a symbol of hope, and that is what the purple candle is for me.

In the book *The Color Purple*, Celie, the heroine, is physically, emotionally and sexually abused as a child and as a wife. But the book is not a story of abuse. It is a story of deliverance from abuse—a story of triumph and joy. The color purple reminds me of the strength of the human spirit to respond to love, to grow, to bloom and to find power to live.

Of the "Celie's" I have met during the past year, a few have experienced or are beginning to experience that blossoming of inner strength. They are beginning to paint the rooms of their lives with the purple of joy. Others are not yet there, but as I wait during Advent, I wait with the hope that they also will find some day that strength and the joy.

* * * * *

I recently tacked a picture to my bulletin board. The picture portrays Christ with a female body hanging on the cross. Some people are offended by this picture, but to me it is a reminder that Jesus understands and cares when people suffer. Jesus entered the world as a poor peasant, was an

outcast, and was eventually painfully executed like a criminal. Such a Christ surely understands the pain and loneliness of a woman whose body and spirit are damaged by those more powerful than she. To me, this picture doesn't try to say that Jesus was a woman. It says that Jesus identifies with powerlessness and suffering. There is comfort and hope for the future in that.

* * * * *

Rituals help to express meaning that words cannot. They put us in touch with feelings. They help us work through grief and pain. They can empower us by giving us a sense that we are part of a larger movement of caring and concern.

For these reasons, at our monthly volunteer meeting we have a candlelighting ceremony to remember the women and men we know who have suffered or died as a result of abuse, and to symbolize the network of caring of which we are a part. We begin with one lighted candle in memory of someone whose life has been damaged or ended by abuse. Then we read the following words together:

*"We stood in darkness. The light which we passed
from one to another has overcome the darkness.
Now we stand in light.
Darkness creeps stealthily over the world,
Lying in wait as the cat watches for the mouse,
Poised to pounce.*

*Darkness threatens to inundate the world,
As water flows along the dike,
Searching for a tiny crack,
First a small trickle, then rushing,
Churning as the crack grows larger
And the wall crumbles,...
One small fist powerless to stop the deluge.*

*Nevertheless the light keeps on shining,
wrestling with the darkness,
Stubbornly burning against all efforts of water
and perversity, human or angelic.
Here and there one flame flickers alone,
grows dim, and dies.
But across the darkness,
Breath on embers growing cold,
Ignites them into leaping flames again.■*

Until recently, Janet Umble Reedy has been the coordinator of a crisis service for victims of wife abuse in Elkhart, Ind. She is now living in Bangkok, Thailand, where she is the country representative for the Mennonite Central Committee.

- Schechter, Susan. *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women Movement*. Boston: South End Press. 1982. An analysis of the battered women's movement historically with a political/social critique.

- Sonkin, Daniel Jay and Michael Durphy. *Learning to Live without Violence: A Handbook for Men*. San Francisco: Volcano Press. 1982. A workbook for men who are

serious about stopping their violence.

- Walker, Lenore E. *The Battered Woman*. New York: Harper and Row. 1979. An early classic that describes the psychology of battered women.

Resource Centers

- Center for Women Policy Studies, 2000 P Street N.W., Suite 508, Washington, D.C. 20036.

- Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1914 N. 34th Street, Suite 105, Seattle, Wash. 98103.

- National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Brooke Claxton Building, 9th Floor, Health and Welfare, Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1B5.



as told to Ruby Friesen Zehr

An Abuser's Story

I guess I need to start when I was a kid. I was adopted as a baby and raised in a Christian home. My dad was basically a good man but he had a bad temper. When my sister and I did things we weren't supposed to, he would slap our faces or beat us with a belt. It seemed that hitting was a normal way to deal with problems. I know now that my mom didn't agree with this but she was afraid to stand up to him. He never hit her, though, just us kids.

We had to go to church every Sunday and we weren't allowed to do a lot of things that other kids did. Sometimes my dad would humiliate us in front of other people. We couldn't say a word or even look angry or we'd get it double. My dad was always quoting the Bible verse to us about children obeying their parents. I didn't find out until years later that the next part of that verse tells fathers not to provoke their children to wrath.

But that's what he did. I was always an angry child, though I wasn't allowed to show it around my father—he always had to be the one in control. I had problems in school and for a couple of years I spent time with a school counselor just about every day. At the time I didn't really know why but I felt pretty good talking to him.

By the time I was a young teen I rebelled. I quit going to church and started drinking. I had had enough of being controlled. When I was 18 and only four credits short of a high school diploma, I just left.

It took me several years to figure out that that wasn't how I wanted to live. I finally decided to come home, finish high school and make something of my life. And that's how I met my wife. We hardly knew each other when we were married in 1982. She'd had a rough childhood and I think she married me to get away from her family. But I loved her and she grew to love me, too.

Our marriage began fairly well. But we both had problems and were never very compatible. She hadn't really had any love as a child and was very insecure and emotionally unstable. And I wasn't very responsible. I kept right on drinking and hanging out with my friends—I wasn't going to let her or anybody change my lifestyle.

Pretty soon we started having troubles and I began to slap her. She would throw things and slap me, too. Even then I knew it was wrong but I kept on doing it—why shouldn't I? In 1984 she had an affair and we were separated for awhile. I never really forgave her for that and the slapping got progressively worse. (I never hit her with my fist. Slapping is bad enough—I'm twice as big as she.) The last straw came just over a year ago in February of 1986. It was the worst fight we ever had and she called the police.

It took something that drastic to make me take a look at myself. They sent four police cars and I had to spend the night in jail. Then the court issued a restraining order so I couldn't go back to live in my own home. So there I was, no place to stay, no money, no car. I had to take a look at myself!

I know now I was pretty lucky. As a pre-trial diversion I was ordered into a program for abusive men called RAGE. I went in with a pretty good attitude because I knew I had a problem. I like to take responsibility for what I do wrong. When I found out that I wasn't the only guy slapping women, I had it made. I was ready for the things I learned after that.

I used to think that hitting somebody when I was angry was just a reaction that was beyond my control. I learned that that isn't true, that I have a choice about how I respond. When things get hot I can leave, take time out—I don't have to be a brutal knucklehead who slaps women around.

I think my marriage would have ended anyway. Still, when my wife filed for divorce I was real depressed and I got into some heavy drinking. Finally, though, I realized that the marriage was over and now I think that's for the best. I started to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. I believe in God and the Bible and try to be a good person. I know that faith and prayer have made it possible for me to make important changes in my life. I learned to let go of all the guilt. Today I have friends and a group of people who care about me. Things have been going well for me this last year and I feel good about myself.

My dad was raised the same way I was and as I got older I realized that he wasn't as good a Christian as I had always thought—he wasn't consistent about following his own rules. He seemed to mellow some as I got older—maybe he realized that I was out of hand and that he had to do something besides beat the crap out of this kid. I remember times when we got stuff out on the table, cried about them and things were forgiven and forgotten.

• **Mennonite Women Educators**

• Three women are among the six Goshen College faculty members who retired this year. They include *Mary Oyer*, professor of music, who served 42 years; *Mary Nafzinger*, professor of education, 37 years; and *Mary Bender*, French professor, 32 years. Oyer, who completed a special two-year project in Kenya this summer, will become

executive secretary of the Brethren-Mennonite Hymnal Project.

• *Frieda Wiebe*, a librarian from Vancouver, British Columbia, recently spent five weeks at the University of Can Tho library in Vietnam. This was her second visit to the university as a consultant for an MCC library development project there.

• In May, *Christine Longhurst* graduated at the top of her seminary class at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas, where she completed a Masters of Sacred Music degree. Now living in Winnipeg, Christine is co-conducting the choir of River East Mennonite Brethren Church, where she is a member. She is also teaching a course in music and worship at Mennonite Brethren Bible College and is

artistic director and conductor for the Winnipeg Mennonite Community Orchestra's fall season.

• *Lorna Schwartzentruber* is serving as interim dean of students at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario while dean Gloria Eby is on extended maternity leave. Lorna, a 1983 graduate of the University of Waterloo, most recently worked as a residential counselor at a maternity home for teens.

My dad died in 1984. I think he realized in his last years that he didn't raise me right. He never said anything about that but we were closer during those last years and I don't resent him anymore. I know he loved us and the last years of his life were a good influence on me.

Things will be different if I ever marry again. Next time I'm going to be sure that I know the person better. We need to know each other's good and bad points so that we can understand each other. I think that communication is the most important part of a marriage. That's something we didn't have. I needed to talk about my feelings but she wouldn't listen. In an argument she never let me say my piece and I got real frustrated. I will try never to get into a situation like that again. And if I do, I will walk away, give myself time to cool off. I know I wouldn't ever hit her. I would treat her like Princess Diana!■

by Melita Rempel

Abuse: Why?

Domestic violence is mysterious in nature. Like many other forms of moral evil, many factors contribute to its tragic presence in our families and communities. But the heart of physical and psychological abuse of women lies in society's discrimination against women.

An imbalance of power is at the core of abuse. It allows those in authority to control or manipulate others. Abuse is possible in relationships patterned after traditional views of gender roles where men control the women in their lives and women submit to this domination. Statistics indicate that 95 percent of spouse abusers are men. This is not surprising since men usually have more personal and political power than women.

Living in intimacy within a marital and family relationship often includes frustrating moments. Conflict in families is normal. Spouse abuse should not be confused with healthy expressions of conflict. When an individual exerts absolute control over another in a hurtful, destructive way, the conflict moves into a completely different sphere.

Choking, kicking, biting, punching and threats of attack with weapons are obvious expressions of physical control that would alter a relationship's dynamics forever. Abuse

is also present when someone verbally degrades another person, psychologically manipulates her or exerts economic control over her. Such non-physical forms of abuse are often as emotionally devastating as physical abuse. All are a consequence of the socially imposed "need" that some men have to control women.

Spouse abuse cuts across all social, economic, cultural and religious lines. Although unskilled blue-collar workers are over-represented in police statistics, middle- and upper-income families also suffer from domestic violence. Higher-income women are often reluctant to seek relief from abuse because it usually means changes in their social status and economic security.

Whether nature or nurture is emphasized in explaining human behavior, it seems clear that childhood experiences influence a person's inclination to use violence. Many abusers—but not all of them—have either been battered as children or have witnessed physical abuse in their families.

In some cases, contributing factors can be identified: addiction to alcohol, frustration from chronic unemployment or stressful work situations, jealousy of real or imagined rivals, a deep sense of personal insecurity. But these are not the root of the problem. There are men who don't drink, who earn piles of money, who evidence no pangs of jealousy and who seem to suffer no sense of insecurity yet who still lay violent hands on their partners. (Paul Jewett, *Theology, News and Notes*, June 1982)

We must address contributing factors. But they should not blind us to the underlying causes that are rooted in traditional views of women's and men's roles within family relationships. Even people who grow up in non-violent families pick up messages that men must dominate and control the women in their lives, and that women must submit to it.

Abusers are not violent all the time. They can be charming and loveable with their spouse and with others. But home is a place where they can vent anger, resentment, suspicion and tension without fear of punishment.

There are two kinds of abusers. Infrequent abusers are usually rigidly inhibited by everything and everybody. No matter how much they are provoked, they are usually able to contain their feelings. But once every three to four months they explode and lash out with anger and aggression.

The majority of abusers are frequent abusers who tend to respond with anger and aggression whenever they become

- **Mennonite Women in Ministry**
- **Nancy Lapp** was ordained by the Indiana-Michigan Conference on July 19 for her work as director of campus ministries at Goshen (Ind.) College. She has been a campus ministries leader for the past six years and also recently graduated from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries.
- **Ted and Mary Yao**, ethnic Chinese who were refugees from Vietnam in the mid-70s, are leading a new Chinese Mennonite congregation in Philadelphia. The couple also began a Mennonite congregation in Lancaster, Pa. in 1985.
- **Phoebe Liu** was recently installed as pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Taipei, Taiwan, the third woman to pastor a Taiwanese Mennonite congregation. Lui graduated from Conservative Baptist Bible College in Hsilo in 1985 and then worked with General Conference Mennonite missionaries Verney and Belva Unruh at Fu-An Church in Hwalien for 18 months.
- **Paul and Bertha Swarr** will be installed as pastoral leaders of Powhatan (Va.) Church on Oct. 11. They recently completed 31 years of service in Israel with Mennonite Board of Missions.
- **Mary Schiedel** was ordained as associate pastor of Elmira (Ontario) Mennonite Church in May. She has served in that capacity since 1985.

frustrated—often weekly. They have difficulty verbalizing their thoughts, feelings or wants; they have low self-esteem; and they find it hard to trust others. Although they many have highly developed verbal skills for their professional lives as businessmen, pastors, contractors, etc., they do not have verbal skills to express their personal needs.

Many abusers have an intense, emotionally dependent relationship with their victims. They seem preoccupied with fear of losing the relationship and take extreme measures to control it. Their control methods include the violence itself, monitoring all activities of the partner, limiting who she sees, etc. Many men are intensely dependent on their marital relationship because they lack other supportive friendships. Although some may appear to socialize easily, most abusers are loners who feel isolated from others.

Most abusers have a high degree of respect for control. They are usually good workers, they obey their superiors, they are very respectful of authority and they seem preoccupied with a need to exert control over their own little empire. The act of abuse is an attempt to reassert their control—control that seems to have been lost. It is an attempt to gain order in their life, to make things right. “We feel we are in control when we are angry and take action.”

Their destructive behavior has its own pay-off and provides its own reinforcement. Abuse victims say, “He got his way,” “He got taken care of,” “He gets respect from the guys,” “He felt powerful because I was frightened.” (Elizabeth Richmond, *Chez Hope* newsletter, Franklin, La.)

Abuse is not the result of momentary loss of control: “He became so enraged, depressed or overwhelmed with stress that he lost control and hurt his partner.” Much abuse has the appearance of being premeditated. Ninety-five percent of assaults occur at night, at home, behind closed doors, when the children are in bed. They are well-planned schemes to exert debilitating control over partners. Many assailants seem to be relieved after they have hurt their partners—it is a cathartic experience. (Eckert Goerz, *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, March 7, 1986)

All abusers tend to justify their behavior by minimizing and denying the extent of the abuse. Sometimes they may provide detailed answers to questions about the abuse and assume responsibility for it. At other times they may say, “It wasn’t that bad.” By minimizing and denying the abuse, they relieve themselves of responsibility for their behavior and the need to change; they are also often able to avert periods of depression.

Spouse abuse—the control of women—will only cease when our society no longer tolerates coercive power and brute force. How can the sex-role stereotypes that contribute to men’s tendency to control women be unlearned? RAVEN, a “resocialization” program in St. Louis, Mo., uses speakers from local shelters, films on male sex roles, sexist language exercises, charts for household duties and decision-making, and logs of controlling behavior. CHANGES in Winkler, Manitoba uses a theme-centered approach which explores unresolved masculine issues and projects positive images of personal growth, nurturance, intimacy and non-violence through discussion of commonalities of abusive men. Neither of these programs guarantees change, but they address some of the underlying concepts which feed abusive behavior. Much more exploration is needed to discover how people who are abusive can give up their obsession with power and control and learn new, wholesome ways to relate to their spouses and children.

Abusers, like recovering alcoholics, need long-term re-education and monitoring. Such a deeply embedded social problem belies quick solutions. “Getting better” for the abuser means a life-long commitment to abstinence from abuse, with many external supports.■

Until recently Melita Rempel was a chaplain and community organizer in a public housing development in London, Ontario. She is now working with Open Circle, an MCC Manitoba prisoner visitation program. She also works part time with the MCC Domestic Violence Task Force.

Mennonite Roots

My roots are Mennonite. I’m a graduate of Goshen College and for a time I worked at MCC in Akron. Since then I’ve been married and divorced; today I live in Nevada where I belong to a church very similar to the Mennonite church.

When I was a member of the Mennonite church it did not have any sanctions against spouse abuse nor did I experience much support as a victim. People told me to pray for him; they told me not to do things to make him angry, that I should try harder to make the marriage work. I don’t recall that anyone ever told my husband not to hit me.

I’m sure the advice was well meant. Still it was not what I needed to hear. I believe in prayer accompanied with action. Often my husband’s anger was triggered by things

• The General Board of the Mennonite Church lists a total of 91 women in leadership ministries—17 are ordained, 17 are commissioned, 19 are licensed, six are deacons and 25 are lay women in leadership positions. Half of the denomination's 22 conferences have official statements permitting the ordination of women, while several others are in the process of studying the

issue. The *major challenge now*, according to the Committee for Women in Leadership Ministries, is for individual congregations to be genuinely open to considering women for pastoral ministry positions.

• Barbara Slough was commissioned and installed as staff minister at College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind. in June. She manages the church's facilities and

serves the commissions on finance/administration and witness/service.

• Doreen Neufeld, Doris Weber and Martha Smith Good, all ordained and active pastors, and Mary Burkholder, a new seminary graduate, each candidly shared experiences of rejection at a workshop on women in ministry held in Bloomingdale, Ontario in June. The objective of the seminar, which brought

together 80 men and women in leadership positions from three eastern Canadian conferences, was to demonstrate that the issue of women in ministry is still not resolved, to provide an opportunity for leaders to hear the struggles women continue to experience, and to help develop new levels of theological understanding and inclusivity.

unrelated to me. He was the one who needed to change his behavior and no amount of trying on my part could make that happen. Given the Mennonite position on peace and non-violence, it seems the church would have told my husband that violence is not acceptable and encouraged him to learn new patterns of behavior. But it didn't.

I stayed with him because I loved him. He wasn't always violent and he was my husband. I took my marriage vow very literally; to me it meant "till death do us part." I did take some risks—I changed some of my own behavior in ways he could not accept and in the end he was the one who left me, thereby ending the marriage.

Today I am actively involved in training volunteers to work with victims of spouse abuse. I also do public education and training with law enforcement personnel. I see my work as part of the church's mission and hope the church recognizes it as such.■

The author of this article is the news director of a radio station. She also directs the Committee Against Family Violence in her community, and is the past president of the state Network Against Domestic Violence.

by Melita Rempel

Mediation in Domestic Violence?

During the last 10 years our communities and legal systems have made great strides in recognizing the seriousness of domestic violence. Although many inadequacies remain, the adversarial court system is helping to build public recognition of domestic violence as a serious crime that will not be tolerated by our society.

Domestic violence is not an extension of the conflict that is present in most families. Conflict in families is normal, but not all family conflicts develop into violence. Some families experience intense conflict that never involves violence. In other families, violence occurs even when there has been no conflict. Once violence enters a relationship, dynamics between the partners change and traditional conflict-solving techniques used in mediation and Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs are no longer appropriate and may even endanger the safety of the woman.

The difference between domestic violence and most crimes is that violence in the home is usually an ongoing crime, deeply ingrained in the relationship and in the batterer's way of thinking. The brokenness cannot be quickly patched up and even in the mediation of seemingly "simple" issues like dividing a bank account, many women are liable to compromise against their real interests for fear of further endangering their lives.

The first step toward wholeness must be to ensure the woman's and children's safety. She needs information and assistance that will help empower her to face up to the reality of the abuse and refuse to allow her abuser to control her life. She needs to experience a sense of justice and discover her personal strengths and self-worth.

At this stage mediation is not a helpful tool for either victim or abuser. Both need the long-term supportive intervention provided by knowledgeable and trusted safe houses, women's and men's groups, counseling, and caring friends.

After significant progress has been made toward achieving some degree of justice and healing, the woman and her abuser may want to make some decisions about other things that might continue their process toward wholeness.

Mediation may be a useful technique at this later stage if all violence or threat of violence has ended, if the victim has experienced some sense of justice, and if the abuser has genuinely acknowledged his responsibility for the abuse. The decision to enter mediation must be a free choice of both victim and abuser.

Each victim should have the freedom to choose the kind of procedure that she thinks will help her healing process. She should not be encouraged to meet with her partner unless she is certain that he will never use violence against her again and she is strong enough to relate to him as an equal. She should not be pressured toward premature forgiveness that is based only on promises without proven evidence of changed behavior. Nor should she feel forced into a reconciliation process that she does not want.

Mediation may help a woman and man work out a strategy for how they can transform their relationship into one that is based on the kind of trust, affection, and mutual support that allows each of them to fully develop their autonomy and self-worth. But this "happily ever after" ending cannot be held up as the only model for success in this kind of mediation. For some couples, permanent separation may be the only solution in a marriage that has already died. In these situations, mediation may provide a helpful tool

- **Opportunities/Resources**
- Gender Roles in International Development is a graduate concentration that has been approved by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Ill. For more information, contact WID, UIUC, 324 Coble Hall, 801 South Wright Street, Champaign, Ill. 61820 or call (217)333-1977.
- The U.S. Peace Section of Mennonite Central Committee is seeking candidates for the section's executive secretary position. John Stoner, current executive secretary, has resigned as of July 31, 1988. Persons wishing to apply or to make nominations should contact: Search Committee Chairman, Luke Stoltzfus, 613 South 48th Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19143 by October 15, 1987.
- MCC's latest *Resource Catalog* is now available. The 1987-88 guide lists more than 400 audiovisuals and printed materials about the mission of MCC, hunger, peacemaking and other topics. Some of the titles having to do with women's concerns are: "The Loads of Lesotho Travel on the Heads of the Women," "Women in Development: The Neglected Key," "Women and Children First: The Human Costs of the Arms Race," "Sylvie's story," and "Man-Made Famine." For free catalog contact MCC, Box M, Akron, Pa. 17501 or MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9.
- Goshen College has an immediate opening for an assistant controller in the accounting office. For more information contact Mardene Kelley, Controller, Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. 46526; (219) 533-3161.

to bring some degree of healing as the relationship's end is formally acknowledged.

Victims, abusers, and mediators need to be clear about what agenda is being mediated, and aware of the needs, responsibilities and legal rights of both parties. In order to do this, mediators will need special training so they fully understand the special dynamics present in abusive family relationships. It will also be helpful to have a man and woman work together as co-mediators.

Used in this way, mediation does not contribute to privatizing and minimizing the serious criminal nature of domestic violence. Neither does it jeopardize the rights of women who often become victims of the power imbalances inherent in abusive relationships. Instead, mediation may be an effective tool that can help former victims and abusers resolve outstanding issues, bring closure to a destructive relationship, or become reconciled to one another.■

Adapted with permission from *Community Justice Report*, December 1986.

We encourage and invite letters from readers that speak to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in Report. Although we try to print all letters, some may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, although writers may request to have their names withheld.

Letters

- I appreciate the *Report* very much and it has been quite an encouragement to me in my spiritual and personal growth. It's refreshing to hear about other women's struggles, joys and accomplishments.

The latest *Report* (No. 71 Women and Counseling) had an interesting review of the "Imposter Phenomenon." Erma Weaver's summary, I felt, had much validity in that often a male's and female's definition of success and self-identity clash. These need to be evaluated, as well as a phony insecurity which cripples us from achieving our God-given potential.

—Patricia Doerksen, Vancouver, British Columbia

- I've just completed reading the May-June *Women's Concerns Report* (No. 72 Asian Women Doing Theology) and want to express my appreciation to Ethel

Yake Metzler for her superb job in preparing this issue. I have been reading *Report* for a number of years and would say that this has been the best yet!

The sections on India were especially meaningful since we found the statistics on treatment of women in that country very consistent with what we observed while in that country in 1984-85.

It was refreshing to see an issue sharing concerns for women in Asia, rather than being preoccupied with our own "local" or American concerns. Let's have more issues with an international emphasis.

—Marilyn K. Studer, Lansdale, Pa.

In this column we continue to share some of your comments about what you like about Report and areas that you think need improvement. If you have not already done so, dig out the evaluation form from the March-April issue and send it in. We welcome your ideas!

Reader Feedback

- What do you like about Report? What are its strengths?
- Geographical spread of contributors, as well as variety of backgrounds. Usually speaks to my inner feelings as a woman.
- Personal stories, accessible writing.
- Each issue is integrated. Also the "Women Worldwide" feature.
- The first-person experiences often shared very vulnerably.
- Storytelling, thematic nature, ethnicity, input from Canadians, firm but not rabid feminism.
- To me it's a way of feeling in touch with Mennonite women. I'm a staunch supporter and I also share this paper freely.
- It has a great many strengths, but I especially appreciate the way you utilize the personal resources, human experiences and expertise of so many women in the church. I have been very grateful for your newsletter for the past several years. It has functioned as a confidante, mentor and healer.

- **Women in the Third World: A Directory of Resources** lists organizations, books, periodicals, pamphlets and articles, audiovisuals and other resources about and by women in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East. Compiled by Thomas P. Fenton and Mary J. Heffron, it is available for \$9.95 plus \$1.50 shipping and handling from Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545
- **Faith and Life Press** has just released *Hope for the Family Farm*. Edited by LaVonne Godwin Platt, contributors are family farmers and rural organizers who explore how faith applies to rural issues. In the United States the book is available for \$7.95 from Faith and Life Press, 718 Main, Box 347, Newton, KS 67114. In Canada it may be purchased for \$10.95 from Faith and Life Press, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4.
- **Daughters of Sarah** is a bimonthly Christian feminist magazine intended for people seeking justice, equality and mutual servanthood in the Christian community. Recent themes have included women and healing, Christian feminist theology, men and mutuality, women and poverty, abortion and women in ministry. To subscribe (6 issues—\$14) write to Daughters of Sarah, P.O. Box 416790, Chicago, Ill. 60641.
- **TransAfrica Forum** published a special edition entitled *Women's Issues in the Pan-African World*. The edition, which includes both scholarly and political analyses of black women's issues, is available from TransAfrica Forum, 545 Eighth St., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003 for \$5.75.

- **What do you dislike about *Report*? What areas need improvement?**
- Sometimes the amount on one page is distracting. Younger women may be less bothered by it but I know older women or anyone with eye problems has more difficulty.
- More poetry/creative writing may enhance some issues.
- As a church publication it is limited in the depth of issues it can handle without being censored by the authorities too badly.
- Sometimes the tone seems to be very belligerent. I thought the issue on women in advertising went overboard *looking* for discrimination. As Christian women, we need to first of all seek to have the Lord's spirit of compassion, even as we work for justice.
- A minor suggestion: fewer letters printed about renewing subscriptions. You might solicit and encourage reader responses on substantive issues.
- Frequency of publication—Give me more!
- Sometimes it seems terribly "crisis-oriented."
- Because issues often consist of a variety of short essays, topics of great importance are often treated superficially. The fact that a different committee member puts each issue together may be part of the reason for the "disjointed" feel I sometimes get when I read *Report*.

• **What are some issues you would like to see covered?**

- I would like to see issues focusing on feminist theology and feminist hermeneutics, as well as strategies for changing the power structures in Mennonite institutions. I'm thinking of envisioning ways of restructuring conference bodies and organizations like MCC so that hierarchical decision-making structures and leadership patterns are replaced by participatory and non-authoritarian ones.
- Women who struggle with selfishness vs. taking care of themselves in a healthy way.
- Aging and retirement as it affects youth as well as older adults
- Women and worship (writers sharing on effective quiet times, insights into worship, worship experiences)

- Seduction of affluence (Women often dictate, subtly, a family's standard of living and sometimes demand affluence to compensate for emotional starvation.)
- Marriage to persons of non-Mennonite background—assimilation into the "Mennonite" mindset and lifestyle, and adaptation to their backgrounds, too.
- Continue coverage on family issues—working mothers, parenting, choosing schools for children, i.e. Christian or public

News and Verbs

- Agnes Hubert will serve as acting director of the China Educational Exchange for an eight-month period starting August while director A.C. Lobe is on a study leave. Agnes and her husband, Barry Nolan, have been staff persons in the Winnipeg offices of CEE, a cooperative project of several Mennonite agencies and colleges, and they also served three years in China as CEE teachers.
- Shirley Yoder has been appointed director of alumni-parent relations at Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Va., succeeding David B. Miller. A 1966 graduate, she was an English teacher and librarian at Western Mennonite School in Salem, Ore. for the past 17 years.
- MCCer Karen Hedenstrom Rois works part time at a Missionaries of Charity's shelter for homeless women in Miami, Fla. The 23-bed shelter is operated by four Roman Catholic sisters from Pakistan, India, Mexico and Illinois. "I am astounded at their continual compassion and understanding toward these women who are for the most part ignored" by society, writes Rois, who is from Roseville, Minn.
- Chiyo Sakakibara recently died at age 88 in Tokyo, where she was a member of Honan Cho Mennonite Church. Throughout her life, Chiyo was active in educational and political affairs. As a young woman, she was a reporter for Fujin no Tomo, a magazine for intellectual women. In 1947 she was elected to the national Diet, Japan's parliament, and served as vice minister of law. She was also a founding member of International Christian University. In 1927 she married Gan Sakakibara, Japan's foremost Anabaptist scholar, who is still living.

- **The Committee on Women's Concerns** is currently updating the *Resource Listing of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Women*. If you would like to be included in this directory of women who are willing to offer their gifts to the church, please fill out the form included in the last issues of *Report* (No. 73 *Widowhood*) and return as soon as possible.

- **BrotherPeace: An International Day of Actions to End Men's Violence** is being called for Saturday, October 17 by the National Organization for Changing Men. It has been planned to coincide with the final day of Domestic Violence Awareness Week. The planners "call on men to publicly protest the war-like levels of violence committed, by men, against women, children, other men and



other forms of life and to celebrate the many ways in which men are changing and acting to stop such violence." For more information, write to BrotherPeace, 3083 West 111 Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44111 or phone (216) 671-5636.

- Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

- **Geneva Hershberger** will be the first paid, half-time staff person for an interdenominational peace association of 14 congregations in Wichita, Kan. She will offer workshops on peace topics and develop peace curriculum for Christian education. Geneva is currently completing a term with MCC Central States.
- **Fay Ode** has received the second Japanese-Mennonite Scholarship of MCC Canada. A second-generation Japanese-Canadian who is currently completing a masters program in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Toronto, Fay will receive a \$1,000 prize for her work to ensure the rights of minority group Canadians.
- **Cynthia Nolt** is replacing **Lori Zook** as legislative/research assistant in the U.S. Peace Section's Washington Office. Cynthia recently earned a masters in environmental toxicology from Cornell University. Lori is working with an organization that is coordinating a womenchurch conference in Cincinnati, Ohio this October.
- **Maureen Kraybill** is the interim director of a home for international students at Millersville (Pa.) University. The home is sponsored by Eastern Board of Missions, where Maureen works in the Discipleship Ministries Department.
- **Noel King** of Eastern Mennonite College, Harrisonburg, Va., has been named the 1987 female scholar-athlete of the year by the Old Dominion Athletic Conference. Noel was a standout player on the college's winning volleyball team and graduated at the top of her class in May, with a major in English and minors in psychology and journalism.
- Two recent Eastern Mennonite College graduates have been named associate and assistant directors of admissions at the Harrisonburg, Va. college. They are, respectively, **Lu Ann Fahndrich** and **Marci Myers**.
- **Randy and Ronda Weber** will direct a new Family Life Resource Center in Harrisonburg, Va. sponsored by the Virginia Conference. The center will provide counseling services as well as assistance to congregations in developing members' gifts of healing and caring. Randy recently completed a doctorate in clinical psychology and Ronda holds a masters degree in social work and has four years of counseling experience.
- "I felt a real conflict between being myself and conforming to society," returned MCCer Jeanette Ewert said about her life in rural Jordan. "In so many ways I wanted to fit in—to eat the food, speak the language... But to fit in as a woman is to lose one's sense of self, to become a non-person." Jeanette and her husband, Lowell, are from Fresno, Calif. and served with MCC in Lebanon and Jordan.
- In Honduras, United Press International reports that the "bordellos bustle with bored GIs." News reports indicate that "prostitution is the major industry these days in Comayagua" three miles from the Palmerola Air Force Base where U.S. servicemen are stationed.

REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Commit-

tee on Women's Concerns.

Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Emily Will, Editor, MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. A donation of \$6.00 per year per subscription is suggested.



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

21 S. 12th St., Box M

PAID

Akron, PA 17501

21 South 12th Street
Box M
Akron, PA
17501